

# Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)



"I feel that WRP has really benefited the wildlife on the restored wetland, but my joy and satisfaction has come from seeing the wildlife," said Roy Carter, St. Paul, Kansas.

photos: Farm Talk

**The** Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) was created as a voluntary land-retirement program designed to assist eligible landowners in restoring and protecting wetlands using three options. These options include permanent easements, 30-year easements, or restoration cost-share agreements.

The main focus of the WRP program in Kansas has been to provide habitat for wildlife and migratory birds including threatened and endangered species.

Nationally, the WRP program authorizes land enrollment up to a total of 975,000 acres by the year 2002. Because WRP is funded through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), funding is not the limiting factor for implementation. Congress limits the number of acres that can be enrolled each year. As a result, other conservation agencies or organizations can provide additional assistance to reduce the landowners' share of the costs, if needed to encourage participation.

In 1999, Kansas obligated 99.8 percent of the available WRP funds for projects. Four contracts were approved which involved approximately 900 acres of land. Most of the WRP easements in the state are permanent easements. About a fourth are 30-year easements, and one restoration agreement was received in 1999. The current backlog of unfunded offers is 20.

Landowner interest in Kansas is greatest in the southeastern third of the state with Neosho County leading the state with about 3,000 acres of WRP easements. Interested landowners have several reasons to sign up, but the main reasons are the belief that it is good for wildlife, conservation, and economically wise. Producers have commented, "These acres should never have been farmed."

In Kansas, the types of WRP restoration projects most often fall into these categories: pothole restoration, flood plain restoration, and riparian corridors. All three categories have their own unique characteristics and successful outcomes.

The main function of pothole restoration is for waterfowl production, while the main function for flood plain restoration is to contain flood flows and to improve and protect water quality. Riparian corridors connect protected areas, providing a safe corridor for wildlife. These restoration activities often involve filling in drainage ditches, breaking tile, and planting native vegetation. In addition, small dams have been created across draws to hold additional water on the sites.

As a federal agency, the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), has the primary administrative responsibility for the WRP, but it also has the authority to develop cooperative agreements with outside conservation groups who can assist with implementation. NRCS also can delegate its authority for monitoring, managing, and enforcing easements to states or other federal agencies that have the resources to do the job.

Almost any former or degraded wetlands are eligible for WRP as long as the wetland is restorable and will provide wildlife benefits. The exceptions are wetlands covered in violation of Swampbuster, land established in trees under the Conservation Reserve Program, and federal lands.

### Eligible lands include:

- Prior converted cropland
- Wetland farmed under natural conditions
- Farmed wetland
- Farmed wetland pasture
- Farmland that has developed wetland functions as a result of flooding
- Rangeland, pasture, or production forestland on which hydrology can be restored

- Other associated wetlands
- Riparian areas that link protected wetlands
- Associated uplands

### Examples of successful projects include:

#### Don and Roy Carter, Neosho County

The hydrology on a 226-acre wetland was restored reducing flooding, improving water quality, and increasing wetland habitat. The owners offer guides for duck hunting which brings economic benefits to the community.

#### Lil Toledo in Neosho County, King Farms (WRP)

The hydrology on a 94-acre, 30-year easement, and a 200 acre permanent wetland was restored. The owner operates an outdoor recreational business of fee hunting, guided tours, and accommodations. The restored wetlands improved wildlife habitat for waterfowl and many other species.

Total Acres in WRP by County in 1999

